

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TUNIS 09156 272310Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 OES-07 INT-05 DOE-11 SOE-02
SSC-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 DOTE-00 EB-08 COME-00 HEW-04
/097 W

-----018860 272319Z /72

O 272210Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9371

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

SECDEF

USCINCEUR/VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 9156

VAIHINGEN FOR ECJ-2

USEEC BRUSSELS

E.O.11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR TS

SUBJ: GOVERNMENT CHANGES RAISE SPECTOR OF NEW PHASE
IN TUNISIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS

REF: (A) TUNIS 9128 (NOTAL, (B) TUNIS 9146

1. EMBASSY, LIKE ALL OTHER POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN TUNISIA,
WAS CAUGHT BY SURPRISE WITH SERIES OF GOVERNMENTAL
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TUNIS 09156 272310Z

CHANGES ANNOUNCED OVER WEEKEND. THESE CHANGES IN FACT
CONTINUE, AS TUNISIAN RADIO ANNOUNCED AFTERNOON
DEC 27 THAT NEWLY NAMED MINISTER OF INDUSTRY MINES AND
ENERGY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ACCEPT HIS NEW POST "BECAUSE
OF HEALTH REASONS," AND THAT HE IN TURN WILL BE REPLACED
BY THE CURRENT DIRECTOR GENERAL OF FINANCE, RACHID SFAR.

2. IN FACT, NEW LIST OF MINISTERS AND SECRETARIES GENERAL IS FOR MOST PART COMPOSED OF MEN WITH GOOD PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS BUT WHO LACK PROMINENT POLITICAL BACKGROUNDS. THREE EXCEPTIONS ARE HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR. WHO HAS BEEN NAMED TO THE NEWLY CREATED POST OF SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT, MOHAMED FITOURI, THE NEW FOREIGN MINISTER WHO HAS BEEN MOVED FROM HIS PREVIOUS JOB AS FINANCE MINISTER AND NEW INTERIOR MINISTER DHAOUI HANNABLIA. ALL THREE HAVE BEEN OR ARE MEMBERS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND ARE ALSO MEMBERS OF THE SEVENTEEN-MAN POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE PSD. ONLY BOURGUIBA JR. CAN BE DESCRIBED AS POLITICALLY POWERFUL IN HIS OWN RIGHTS.

3. TAHAR BELKHODJA HAD BEEN GENERALLY IDENTIFIED AS LEADING EXPONENT OF "CONCILIATORY LINE" IN PREVIOUS CABINET AND HIS REMOVAL IS VIEWED AS STRENGTHENING OF "HARD LINERS" FARHAT AND SAYAH, LED BY PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA.

4. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY JOURNALISTIC AND POLITICAL SOURCES THAT IN LAST POLITICAL BUREAU MEETING BELKHODJA REFUSED TO FOLLOW NOUIRA POLICY OF USING POLICE TO BREAK EXPECTED STRIKES IN PHOSPHATE AND RAILROAD SECTORS. BECAUSE OF THESE POLICY DIFFERENCES AS WELL AS SPECIFIC INSUBORDINATION NOUIRA WENT TO PRESIDENT MORNING OF DEC 23 WITH A "HIM OR ME" ULTIMATUM. PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY SIDED WITH NOUIRA, AND FARHAT WAS INSTALLED WITHIN THE HOUR. BELKHODJA IS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TUNIS 09156 272310Z

SAID TO HAVE BEEN UNAWARE OF EVENTS UNTIL TELEPHONED BY HIS WIFE FROM TUNIS. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT MADAME GOURGUIBA, WHO LOOKED UPON BELKHODJA AS A PROTEGE AND CONFIDANT, WAS CAUGHT EQUALLY UNAWARES.

5. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE AS YET NO CONFIRMATION WE ARE TOLD THAT MINISTER OF NATIONAL ECONOMY LASRAM RESIGNED IN PROTEST NEXT DAY, SHORTLY FOLLOWED BY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTY AND MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS ENNACEUR. THUS BELKHODJA'S REMOVAL PERCIPITATED WHAT GOVERNMENT HAS CHARACTERIZED AN "MINI CRISIS", REQUIRING PROMPT REPAIR WORK BY NOUIRA.

6. COMMENT: TAHAR BELKHODJA'S REPORTED BEHAVIOR, IF TRUE, SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN FAIR GROUNDS FOR REQUIRING HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE CABINET. THE DEPARTURES OF CHATTY AND LASRAM HAVE BEEN THE SOURCES OF RUMORS FOR OVER A YEAR. WHETHER THEY WERE SACKED OR SIMPLY PROFITED FROM THE CURRENT CONJUNCTURE IS NOT CLEAR. BOURGUIBA JR.'S RE-EMERGENCE IS MORE SURPRISING AS HE HAS LONG GIVEN EVERY IMPRESSION OF WANTING TO BE COMPLETELY OUT OF POLITICAL LIFE. HIS PRESENCE AT HIS FATHER FATHER'S ELBOW WILL, FOR ONE THING, ACT AS A COUNTER-

INFLUENCE ON WASSILA BOURGUIBA'S REPORTED INFLUENCE ON THE PRESIDENT AND HER FAVORITISM FOR MASMOUDI, TAHAR BELKHODJA, HABIB ACHOUR AND THE "LIBYAN CONNECTION". SOME OF THE NEW CABINET FACES LACK THE LOOK OF PERMANENCE, BUT THEY ARE ALL RESPECTABLE IF NOT YET DISTINGUISHED PROFESSIONALS. GEOGRAPHICALLY TOO THE NEW CABINET SEEMS REMARKABLE FOR ITS REPRESENTATIVENESS, MORE SO THAN ANY WE CAN REMEMBER. WE WOULD HESITATE TO LABEL THE NEW MEN OUTRIGHT AS "TECHNOCRATS" SINCE THEY ALL HAVE GOOD PARTY BACKGROUNDS, BUT MOST HAVE MADE THEIR LIVING IN GOVERNMENT OR GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED ENTERPRISES. THEY DO NOTICEABLY SEEM FOR THE MOST PART TO HAVE EXCELLED IN THE ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS SECTORS. HOWEVER, THERE IS NOTED ABSENCE OF ANYONE KNOWN OR REMOVED TO BE "A LIBERAL". THE SWING SEEMS TO BE TO THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 TUNIS 09156 272310Z

CONSERVATIVE SIDE. IN THE THREATENED CONFORMATION WITH THE LABOR MOVEMENT NOUIRA HAS PROVIDED HIMSELF AND THE PRESIDENT WITH A TEAM OF MEN HE IS PROBABLY COMFORTABLE WITH.
MULCAHY

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS, MINISTERS (DIPLOMATS)
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 27-Dec-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TUNIS09156
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770482-0636
Format: TEL
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771214/aaaaaloc.tel
Line Count: 141
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 170b5efc-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 TUNIS 9128, 77 TUNIS 9146
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 125098
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOVERNMENT CHANGES RAISE SPECTOR OF NEW PHASE IN TUNISIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, TS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/170b5efc-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009